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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 FREETOWN 000078

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W (JHUNTER/ESPRUILL) AND AF/EPS
BRUSSELS FOR DEA (TSCARANTINO)

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [PHUM](#) [MASS](#) [SNAR](#) [PINR](#) [SL](#)
SUBJECT: KOROMA MAKES PROGRESS ON DRUGS; WE URGE SWIFTER
MOVEMENT ON HUMAN RIGHTS

REF: A. 08 STATE 117985
[1](#)B. STATE 18222
[1](#)C. FREETOWN 48
[1](#)D. FREETOWN 65

Classified By: Ambassador June Carter Perry for reasons 1.4 (b/d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Ambassador met with President Koroma on February 27 to discuss the new administration's policy goals and pending bilateral issues, underlining the President's importance in the region as a bulwark of stability. The meeting was also attended by Foreign Minister Zainab Bangura, DCM, and Poloff. Ambassador relayed information regarding President Obama's and Secretary Clinton's policy priorities, and the expected impact these could have on our relationship with Sierra Leone. She also addressed Koroma's long-standing interest in the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), using the topic as a segue to discussing the 2009 Human Rights Report. She reminded him that upholding human rights, including gender equality, is a critical element of MCC eligibility. Ambassador reminded Koroma that the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) is still waiting to be signed, and that our request for the expulsion of indicted criminals to the U.S. is pending. Koroma was gracious, stating his hope for positive change under Obama's administration, and for continued excellent relations between our two countries. He was open to the human rights discussion, confirming that his government will begin placing a keener focus on eliminating female genital mutilation. He also welcomed the opportunity to collaborate on MCC eligibility, requesting a plan of firm actions he and his government can take to improve their chances. Finally, Koroma green-lighted the expulsion of narcotics traffickers under indictment in the United States, following the conclusion of the ongoing cocaine trial, saying that they will be effected immediately following the judgment. End Summary.

A NEW POLITICAL ERA: PRESIDENT OBAMA AND SECRETARY CLINTON

[1](#)2. (C) Ambassador informed Koroma of the new administration's policy priorities, including: building stronger partnerships with other nations; resolution of global threats; resolution of the financial crisis; enhanced diplomacy; and furthering development goals, and maintaining a strong defense for ourselves and our allies. A potential surge of the USAID presence in-country was discussed with Ambassador relaying optimism that new staff will be hired to manage development programs. Peace Corps has also been prioritized for a return to Sierra Leone, pending budgetary decisions. The Ambassador praised Sierra Leone as being one of our "staunchest partners" on defense in the sub-region, recognizing the great strides that the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) have made with regards to professionalization.

13. (C) Koroma responded that he welcomed the elections outcome in the United States, and that many on the African continent view Obama's leadership with hope and enthusiasm. He noted that expectations for Obama's presidency are extremely high, especially in terms of resolving global issues related to establishing and maintaining peace and ameliorating the financial crisis. He stated that what happens in America impacts the rest of the world, and that he looks to the United States to set the example in finding and implementing solutions to significant problems. He welcomed any future enhanced USAID support, and expressed his hope for the speedy return of Peace Corps volunteers.

MCC: SHOWING PROGRESS TO MEET INDICATORS

14. (C) The Ambassador informed Koroma that the requested Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) technical team visit had been postponed for the region. However, MCC management is interested in conducting a digital video conference with Sierra Leonean technical experts in March. Koroma continues to look forward to a visit, but expressed satisfaction with a video conference for the interim. He stated that his government would value specific benchmarks to meet, with a detailed action-plan outlining how to reach them. The Ambassador responded that the MCC team would be able to provide useful guidance to help move Sierra Leone towards eligibility. She reiterated the necessity of implemented anti-corruption, health/education and women's rights' advancements as some of the criteria and observed that as the new administration continues to firmly set its federal

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management structures, the ultimate construct of the MCC would likely be known at a later date.

15. (C) Ambassador used the MCC discussion as an introduction to the 2009 Human Rights Report, which Secretary Clinton had presented to the public on February 25. She lauded Sierra Leone's positive activities, such as the passage of a tough revision to the anti-corruption legislation, continued religious tolerance, and Koroma's public stance decrying human rights violations in Zimbabwe, and the recognition of Kosovo. Still, she said, Sierra Leoneans continue to experience human rights abuses, especially against women. Ambassador noted that domestic violence and rape are universal problems in Sierra Leone, and that female genital mutilation (FGM) continues, even against young children. She further noted the recent case (reftel C) of journalists being beaten and abused because of the anti-FGM stance.

16. (C) Koroma leafed through the Human Rights Report, and expressed his "disappointment" that the journalists were abused. He said that he hoped the individuals who perpetrated the beatings upon the journalists will be seen as individuals and extremists, and not representatives of the government or country. He also stated that the government plans to expand its FGM sensitization, which he hopes will help to address the problem.

SIGNING THE SOFA

17. (C) Ambassador highlighted DoD-sponsored training, including recent work to help the RSLAF destroy caches of weapons from the war. She also informed him of the upcoming ACOTA assessment, praising Sierra Leone for its interest in undertaking peacekeeping operations across the continent. She reminded him, however, that the SOFA agreement is still pending, and that its signing would be a positive indicator that Sierra Leone is a full partner with the United States in terms of defense-related issues. Koroma responded that the SOFA is with the Attorney-General for his review, and that he expects to have final meetings on the issue soon. He also

informed Ambassador of significant "staffing limitations" in the Office of the Attorney-General, which is delaying movement on the SOFA issue (Note: The AG has been reviewing the SOFA for months, and seems unmotivated to move it forward despite Presidential pressure. The discussion of staffing shortfalls was likely Koroma's way of excusing the AG's usual inertia. End Note).

REMOVING THE DRUG THUGS: KOROMA FINALLY AGREES

18. (C) Ambassador reminded Koroma of the pending expulsion request for two indicted criminals, and presented him with a third expulsion request for a material witness (reftels A and B). She praised the Sierra Leonean justice system for the expeditiousness of the ongoing cocaine trial, informing Koroma that the USG has no interest in interrupting their process for the removal of the three individuals. Koroma responded that the case will be concluded in the very near future (Note: Post estimates it will be another four to six weeks. End Note), and that the requests will be honored immediately following the completion of the trial. He also stated, per reftel D, that he believes the timing is right for other wanted Sierra Leonean narcotraffickers to face justice, stating that no one would be exempted from expulsion or extradition. Koroma made clear that Ousmane Conte's arrest in Guinea opens doors for other fugitives, such as Gibrilla Kamara, to be arrested, and that he hopes this will happen soon.

OFFICIAL VISIT REQUEST REDUX

19. (C) Koroma made a gentle push for an official visit to the U.S., a request made by both him and the Foreign minister last year. Ambassador explained how complicated scheduling such visits can be. She further explained that countries' records on human rights and judicial reform were important as were their positions on international conventions in evaluating the strategic importance of each year's visit schedule. She also informed him that concrete action in key areas, such as the SOFA signing, would be a strong signal to the administration that Sierra Leone is a dynamic country in terms of making and meeting development objectives; Koroma's

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continued, visible leadership in the sub-region would help strengthen Sierra Leone's "re-branded" image. Holding Iran's feet to the fire in terms of its actions in violation of UN Security Council resolutions and IAEA requirements would be an excellent example of Sierra Leone showing its independence from external pressures as well as its commitment to international protocols.

COMMENT

110. (C) Koroma, always amicable and welcoming of the COM and other USG representatives, spoke eloquently and enthusiastically about supporting our priorities and initiatives. Despite the positive rhetoric, however, he did not waiver from his tendency to make vague promises of action, such as stating that he will hold final meetings regarding the SOFA agreement, but failing to give a time frame for his government's response. Given that this is his norm, it makes his promise regarding the expulsions both surprising and heartening. A successful resolution on this issue will strengthen our bilateral relationship, demonstrate willingness to work with the USG on issues of common interest and concern, and provide a precedent for similar situations in the future. His agreement to the expulsion is a considerable victory on the bilateral front, and praise from both post and Washington when it is carried out will

reinforce to Koroma that taking action has significant positive benefits. Reminding Koroma that holding a position of power requires doing, as well as saying, the right things, and firm action will be critical to be viewed as a beacon of responsible leadership. While the Sierra Leonean President has made some cabinet changes, private sector sources advise that he has essentially "reshuffled the deck" rather than taken bold action to demonstrate concrete action against corruption. If there is any weakness we see developing, it is Koroma's hesitation to be swift and decisive. He has articulated his goals well; carrying them out will be the real test as he continues his second year in office. End Comment.

PERRY